DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 234 621 FL 013 939

AUTHOR Harkness, Frances; Miller, Larry
TITLE A Description of the Interaction among Mother, Child and Books in a Bedtime Reading Situation.
PUB DATE 9 Oct 82
NOTE 47p.; Paper presented at the Annual Boston University Conference on Language Development (7th, Boston, MA, October 9, 1982).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; Language Acquisition; Listening Comprehension; *Oral Reading; *Parent Child Relationship; *Story Reading; Young Children

ABSTRACT

The manner in which story reading time is enacted by a specific mother and child was investigated. Data were tape recorded story reading sessions between a mother and her three-year-old son over a nine-month period. Forty sessions were recorded from which six were selected for analysis. Analysis centered on how stories were presented to the child, how he reacted to them, and any changes over time in this reaction. Analysis indicated that although the ultimate control of the reading situation rested with the mother, she was very sensitive to the child's need for information. She was willing to negotiate the choice of book or abandon her agenda in favor of the child's. In the first readings, the mother used the readings as the last means of describing events on a page. The mother frequently used the text as a basis for interpreting events to her child. Gradually, she withdrew from this role, and the child began to recognize that the written speech had a meaning of its own. Consequently, the child progressed from labelling characters and events to speculating on the causes of these events and their effects on the characters. It is concluded that development of the child's ability to seek out and understand more complex information is undoubtedly the result in part of the child's increased linguistic competence and gradual maturing. (RW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED234621

A Description of the Interaction Among Mother, Child and Books in a Bedtime Reading Situation

Frances Harkness
9 St. Lawrence Avenue
Kingston, Ontario

and

Larry Miller
Faculty of Education
Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario

FL013939

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Larry Miller

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Paper presented at the Seventh Annual Boston Conference on Language Development, October 9, 1982.

In his discussion of studies that show a positive correlation between parents' reading to children and the children's later achievement Teale (1981a) points out that the exact nature of this relationship remains unknown. He suggests that "instead of merely correlating the amount of time a child is read to with gross measures of language development or reading achievement, ... we need to examine closely the underlying construction and underlying organization of story book reading events." The type of examination he suggests would presumably try to determine exactly what happens during story reading that might contribute to literacy. Teale (1981b) mentions as well a study by Heath (in press) which shows that various communities have different styles of reading to their children. These styles are hypothesized to play a role in whether the children learn to read easily or not, thus providing support for the idea that there is more to reading to children than merely doing it.

Our purpose in this study is to investigate the question of how story reading time is enacted by a specific mother and child. By doing this we hope to acquire insights into the question of pre-school literacy acquisition. Literacy is used here not as a description of a particular skill (reading), but in terms of a broad range of attitudes and knowledge about the printed word. One of the most compelling rationalisations for work such as this is given by Mason (1981) in her theoretical considerations of the development of literacy in preschoolers:

Since it took Soderbergh's child a full year - given concentrated parental help - to pass through the pre-reading levels and since only half the four year olds (Mason 1980) tested moved through one level of prereading in the nine months they were observed, it seems likely that children who are given next to no help at home, therefore being unlikely to recognize printed words and still less letter sounds may be as many as three years behind their more fortunate parent-assisted peers when they start school.

READING AS COMMUNICATION

Mother-child interactional studies are a widely accepted way of documenting language development that have arisen from the awareness that language is not merely the ability to produce words and sentences. As John Dore describes it: "to master a language the child must acquire a complex set of broadly transferable skills - perceptual, motor, conceptual, social and linguistic." Language is, after all, a way of communicating between humans that requires at least two participants. Though it may sometimes seem to occur for the pleasure of hearing oneself talk it serves many other functions such as attracting attention, signalling needs, and providing information.

It is probable, since parents spend most time with the child, that they are the primary language facilitators, offering a model of language as well as being mediators for the child's attempts at expression. This mediating role of parents is noted by Ninio and Bruner (1978) who mention that "mothers are ready to accept an astonishing variety of responses on the baby's part as his turn in the conversation and to interpret anything he does as having a specific intelligible content." In this regard

they refer to work by Snow (1976) who speculates that no matter what the child actually says, the mother interprets it in terms of what she thinks he is saying. Ninio and Bruner suggest further that the mother supports the child's conversation within the framework of her own, providing a model of what is appropriate in a given situation. As the child's speech develops he gradually assumes a more and more competent role in this conversation and the framework is gradually withdrawn.

Wells (1980), reporting on his comprehensive research into mother-child interaction, points out that both parent and child may affect the quality and quantity of each other's responses by the nature of their input. A child who contributes little will likely receive less in the way of elaboration or support than a more active contributor. Similarly, a parent who is authoritarian or insensitive to the child's utterances may not give the child the support or stimulation he needs thus causing him to contribute less. Various types of situations evoke a different quality of responses as well. Snow (1977) notes, for example, that language is more complex in book reading situations. This may be because the book provides a stable, stimulating framework of pictures and language on which to build a discussion. This would suggest an interactional effect between the processes of literacy acquisition and language development.

Reading is another form of communication, this time between author and reader and it requires a number of skills on the part of both in order for it to be enacted successfully. A discussion

of the differences between oral and written language is given by Schallert, Kleiman & Rubin, (1977), but we will concentrate on one particular issue: meaning structure.

In order to hold the attention of his reader the author must build on or establish meaning structures which are either common to the reader or can be understood by him when explained. These meaning structures are conventions regarding language, situation, character, time and location which have been established by the literate society he is writing for. Omission of detail could be thought of as an example of one of these conventions. No author, for example, describes everything that is occurring in a story; much is left to the reader's imagination or his ability to infer missing information. The reader must thus be able to draw from a range of experience and knowledge of these structures and enter actively into the author's hypothetical situation as he constructs his own interpretations of the intended meaning. Rommetveit (1978) describes communication in the following terms:

> A distinctive feature of an act of communication is its inbuilt complementarity: we speak on the premises of the listener and listen on the premises of the speaker and the resultant state of intersubjectivity represents a transcendance of the private worlds of the two participants engaged in the act.

This is as true between author-reader as it is between speaker-listener.

It follows there is information a child must acquire in order to look at books and understand stories. Work completed in this area has included an analysis of the differences between print and conversation (Schallert, Kleiman &

Rubin, (1978); an outline of the knowledge of language and print a child needs before he can start to decode (Schickedanz, 1978; Mason, 1981, among others); speculation on the type of metacognitive knowledge a child must have to be able to be an active participant in the reading event (Downing, 1979). These studies deal, however, with the child vis-a-vis print. The questions of pre-print knowledge of books, story line awareness and meaning structures have been less adequately dealt with.

Before being able to interpret pictures or understand stories the child must be aware of the conventions in use regarding representation and meaning as they may be used by authors or artists. As a beginning step in this, for example, he must realize that pictures as well as words are symbols that represent the real world of objects. This information, like so much other information given to the child in the preschool years is most likely passed on incidentally from parent to child - in this case in the book reading situation. Thus one can hypothesize a facilitating role for the parent (the literacy holder) for the child (the literacy acquirer).

ROLES IN THE INTERACTION

Now that we have suggested the role of mother as facilitator in a child's acquisition of literacy and have hinted at some of the preprint knowledge the child must acquire, we must attempt to characterize the interaction.

Story reading is a situation that is quite different from ordinary mother-child dialogue for which models have been derived by researchers such as Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), Wells (1981), etc. In fact, it is hardly a dialogue since we must take into account the very intrusive presence of the book which defines the beginning and end of the event as well as supplies a schedule of activities. Both the physical presence of the book and the author as participant add yet another element to the interaction. The book is thus not a passive participant but offers a whole range of new alternatives for the mother and child. It provides a focus as well as cues for furthering the dialogue and hastening it towards its end (turn the page, please!); it provides a stimulus for conversation in both pictures and text; it provides a beginning and end to the interaction so that each participant at any given time knows approximately what the status of the interaction is; it provides a whole range of meanings - those intended by the author and those interpreted by the participants. It also, and perhaps most importantly, provides a purpose for the interaction.

The relationship is approximately as follows:

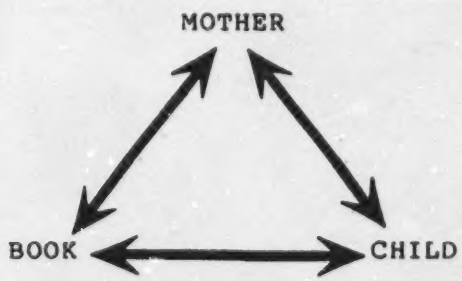

Diagram 1

with equal importance given to each participant.

In the present study we wish to examine the following things:

1. the interactional pattern (who begins the conversation, how this is done, who ends the conversation, how this is done, etc.)
2. the types of information that are transmitted
3. how this transmission of information takes place.

Diagram (2) depicts a model for the characterization of interaction on the outside which serves as support and framework for the information that is being conveyed on the inside. It both influences and is influenced by the information. In a similar way the information the participants want to convey is both shaped by and shapes the type of interaction. Both aspects are important singly and in their relationship to each other.

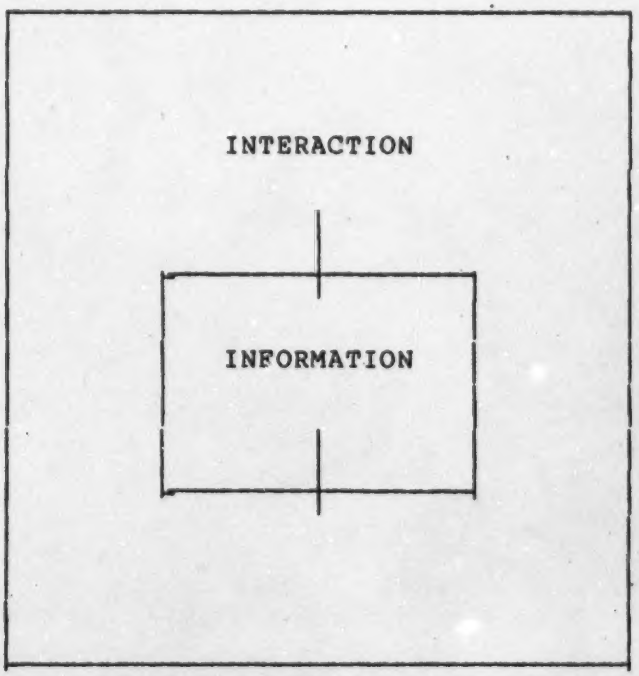

Diagram 2

DATA COLLECTION

The data for this study were collected by recording story reading sessions between a mother and her child, a boy aged three years and zero months at the start of the recordings and three years and nine months at the end. The family consisted of the father, a university professor, mother, a former high school special education teacher and two girls aged five and seven. The mother was instructed to go about reading to the child as she normally would, just making sure that they were near enough to the tape recorder that their voices would record. She made a point of explaining to the child what the tape recorder was for and it became his job to turn it on and off. The parent was asked to make one or two recordings a week although no set number was required. We preferred not to create the artificial situation of having to read for tapings. The selection of print material was left to the parent and child. The mother said later that although she felt influenced by the tape recorder in the first few taping sessions she felt quite comfortable as time went on. She believed that the readings were much as they would have been if it had not been there.

Books read were taken from those in the collection for the children at home or were obtained from the library. The tapes were transcribed by a research assistant and rechecked by both investigators for interpretation of what the child was saying. Some of his speech remained unintelligible even after consultation with the mother.

A total of forty sessions were recorded from which we selected six tapings for analysis in this paper. In the selection process we rejected any tapings that were incomplete, that dealt solely with labelling activities or were readings of nursery rhymes or poetry. It was obvious that different types of reading activities provoked widely different responses in the mother and child. Our interest centred on how stories were presented to the child, how he reacted to them and how, if at all, this changed with time. Thus we chose the tapings of Fred and Ted*, Meg and Mog, and Meg at Sea which were all taped twice over the course of the year. They are all quite similar in style and content, (i.e., a simple text of approximately twenty-five pages, two or three main characters and vivid illustrations.) The dates of the readings are as follows:

*Fred and Ted (F&T 1)	:	September
Meg and Mog (M&M 1)	:	October
Fred and Ted (F&T 2)	:	November
Meg at Sea (MS 1)	:	February
Meg at Sea (MS 2)	:	May
Meg and Mog (M&M 2)	:	May

Hereafter the books will be referred to by the initials and number as in the brackets.

*The actual name of Fred and Ted is Big Dog, Little Dog...a Bedtime Story, but it became easier to refer to it by Fred and Ted.

ANALYSIS

Since little work has been done in this area we had to devise a descriptive system that would take into account all the factors involved in the book reading situation. When we considered the role of the book in the interaction we decided that it determined to a large extent the boundaries of the story reading time as well as selection of topics for conversation. The overall structure of the interactional situation consisted of mother and child deciding to read, choosing a book, reading through it, finishing off and going on to some other activity. We called this a reading event defined as an activity with a recognisable beginning and end in which the action centers around one particular stimulus, in this case the book. When two or more books were read in sequence in the same session, we treated them as separate events for the purpose of analysis.

Negotiation for a book was quite common as indicated in the following example:

(Train book) Sept. 80

M: Which one first the airplane book or the train book?

J: Two.

M: Two books.

J: One, two,

M: One, two. Which one do you want to read first?

J: This one.

Sometimes the Mother would indicate her desire to go on to another activity:

M: OK Let's read the Meg book now, I'm tired of this one. OK?

J: Why?

M: Let's read the Meg book. Because I don't know. OK, let's read the Meg book then I'm not going to read anymore. It's getting a little slow here.

In many of the reading events for which we have data and for two of the six under consideration here, this negotiated opening was followed by a long "display" by the child. In one case (M&M 1) he turned to the page he liked best and proceeded to give his version. In another (F&T 2), he actually tried to read the story in what appeared to be an imitation of a previous reading. Note the words "Oh dear" in the following example. This is a favorite expression used by the mother on several occasions in her readings.

F&T 2

J: Is he going big bed, or is he going small bed? Oh dear. Well, I can't do anything. Stay right there and, and, stuck out. That's your part and that is your part.

M: Shall I read that?

J: That part.

M: OK. Shall we start?

J: That's my part.

M: OK, who is going to read their part first?

J: Mine.

M: OK.

J: By a house. Oh dear, dear, they're running in and they're going fast. Your turn.

M: Ted jumped into the little bed upstairs and Fred jumped into the little bed downstairs.

J: Mm.

M: Mm. Can we start at the front of the book? Can we start way over to the front?

The negotiation and "display" were followed by a reading of the text which was usually done page by page although some pages were ignored. Leaving out a page may have been a conscious decision of the mother that could be attributed to many factors such as degree of difficulty of text, interest level, desire to finish quickly, disinterest on the part of the child. Usually the reading followed strictly the order of the text but there were three exceptions when the child skipped a page in anticipation of future events or because his glance settled on something that seemed to interest him more on the next page.

The end of the reading event was almost always indicated by some verbal signal either by the mother or the child. In four of the sessions the mother made pointed use of the word "good-bye" on the last page of the story to indicate that the reading was over. In both of the other sessions the child indicated a desire to conclude the reading. A good example of this is from F&T 1:

M: No, they're not getting mad anymore, are they? Did their mad go away?

J: Yes.

M: What about mine?

J: That's all!

M: That's all.

J: Yes.

This finite nature of the reading event seemed to be fully understood by both participants as mention was made at the beginning of several of the tapings we amassed that another activity would occur after this one was finished: e.g., "After

we're finished we'll go to Canadian Tire" or "When we're finished here you can read for a while while I make dinner." This realisation did not have any effect on the manner in which the reading was carried out that we could detect.

The child apparently had learned by the time the recordings were started to devote his full attention to the reading event, for rarely in all of the data collected and not once in the stories under consideration here did he ask for or provide information that was not in some way related to story or picture at hand. This held true even though the mother was often distracted by another adult or the other children in the house. On at least one occasion (F&T 2) the reading event occurred in the middle of such noise and confusion that the tapings were extremely difficult to transcribe. The length and depth of his attention span were quite remarkable since most of the reading sessions lasted for at least ten minutes and were sometimes as long as half an hour.

An interesting aspect of the sessions was their atmosphere. Although we have no direct evidence from the mother or the child saying that the reading was fun, it is obvious from listening to the tapes that both were enjoying the sessions. The child on many occasions became very excited about what he was seeing in the book. The mother interspersed her speech with such comments as "I love it", "I love you", "Oh, J, you're so...". Her delight with his answers or comments was often shown by appreciative laughter and on several occasions she expressed her approval and

enjoyment to an adult who was also present in the room as in the following example:

F&T 2

M: The green one is Fred and the red one is (J&M together) Ted. Yes, this is green on your shirt too. And the carpet is green.

J: Oh dear! What's this?

M: (to Father): I love it.

Father: I love it too, boy.

J: What?

M: We just love you.

Only a few times in all the data collected did she become impatient. Usually this occurred after a long series of "why" questions from the child. Note the following:

MS 1

J: Uh oh. Nobody's sailing.

M: No, that boat is tied. Don't worry, that boat is tied.

J: Why is that boat tied?

M: Because it's tied.

J: Mum?

M: I said it was tied.

Within the framework of the reading event were a number of well defined units which consisted essentially of all the conversation that took place concerning a given page. Most of our analysis centres around what happened during these units, since each page seemed to provide a new stimulus to each of the participants much like a formal conference agenda. Though pages in story books such as these are linked thematically, usually

each one is a self contained entity in which picture and text combine to describe one tableau in a series.

A unit was started by one of the participants Reading, Asking a Question or Offering a Comment. We called this the Initiation. An Initiation called for a Response which was followed by either an Evaluation or a Continuation or a Closure.
Some of the terminology here is borrowed from Mehan (1979).

Thus as each page (stimulus) in a story was encountered there were a number of options available to the participants. Both Mother and child could ignore the stimulus (Option 1) and proceed to the next page. The Mother could Initiate (Option 2) giving the child a variety of Response options. The child could Initiate (Option 3) giving the mother a variety of Response options. Each Response option then offered another set of possible continuing Responses until the unit was closed and a new stimulus was acknowledged. This procedure is represented in Diagram 3.

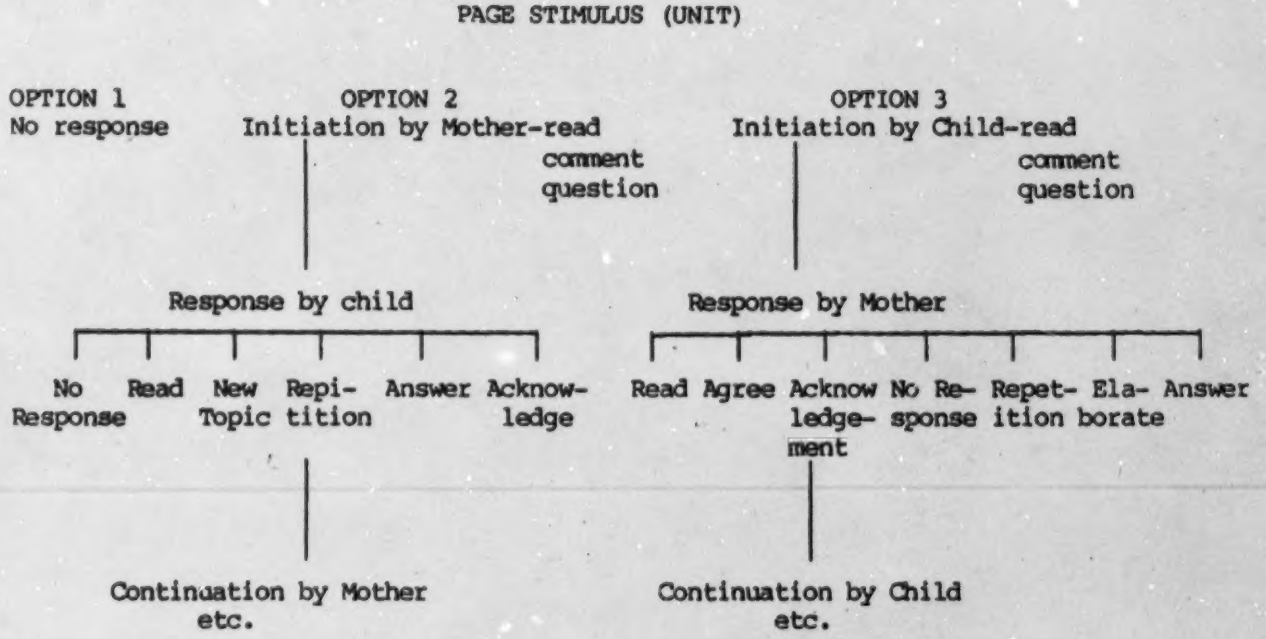

Diagram 3: Initiation and Response Options

In many of the units there was what seemed to be a type of Closure such as "Mm-Hm" or "Yes" or even a repetition of a previous comment. This did not seem to be meant as a response or a continuation but rather as conveying the message "The unit is now finished".

Even though we could not see pages being turned, nor in some cases could we hear it, it was most often quite obvious from the conversation when a new page was being considered. Sometimes the mother would give a hint: "Are we finished this page?"; sometimes she would start directly into a new page by reading it; occasionally the child would comment on something first; sometimes the clue took the form of a closure as discussed above. There were some problems that arose while trying to make the unit

divisions, however. When the action described in two pages was quite similar, and there were long conversations with no text read, we had to make a judgement based on what seemed to be happening. On two occasions, mother or child answered a question during discussion of one page that had been asked on a previous one. In these instances we treated the reading of the second page as a unit by itself and included the explanation with the previous unit.

Inside the units the participants could discuss one or more topics. A topic was defined as all the conversation about a given subject such as some aspect of the picture at hand or some item of information introduced by mother or child.

In any reading event the choice of initiating options for page units is probably governed by a number of factors including: condition of the participants (tired, eager, restless), the page itself (how interesting, how complex, etc.), the child's level of language development, the number of times the story has been read, the child's level of literacy (is he at the labelling stage? does he understand anything about plot or character?) and the purpose of each participant in regard to the reading session. If, for example, the mother is tired she may be more inclined to rush through a story. If, on the other hand, the child does not feel well it will be harder for the mother to get his attention. He may also make fewer contributions thus giving fewer clues to the mother about his knowledge and interests. Similarly, for interaction to be successful the mother must be aware of the

child's level of functioning. If she merely reads through a story in which the language and story line are too complicated the child will be unable to play a role in the story-reading time and presumably will become impatient or inattentive. Cross (1978) has shown that a mother adjusts her speech for her child. Similar studies have shown that older children and other adults do this as well. Presumably this will be true in the reading situation too as the mother gears her treatment of the story to what she feels the child will understand. This will of course also depend on what she sees in the story and is able to draw out. A more complete discussion of this is continued in a later section of the paper.

It is probably safe to assume that one of the purposes for these story-reading sessions (although there are probably numerous goals held by each participant) was to share an experience and communicate about a book. When asked why she read to her child, the mother replied that her mother had read to her, that it was a nice way of being together and that the child liked it. To this list of reasons could be added that reading is one of the few opportunities an adult has of having an extended conversation with a young child. The book presents an agenda which is not too taxing to follow and when one topic of conversation is finished a new one is waiting just over the page. Since adults tend to be more goal oriented and conscious of time constraints it also provides a way out of conversation and an opportunity to go on to other activities.

A successful reading session would thus be one in which both participants made contributions that were responded to by the other and gave some evidence of pleasure or satisfaction in doing it. That each of the reading events under consideration here was successful is evidenced by the fact that each party was in some way contributing to the experience and these contributions were received by the other, were usually understood and were appreciated. Thus the mother must have had some grasp of what the child could manage in terms of the story and was able to structure her conversation to help him share in the experience.

Consider the following example which points out just how the mother takes into account the knowledge of the child and responds accordingly. Complete text for the page is "Bess, Jess, Tess and Cress all changed into mice and Mog chased them."

M: Oh no! They changed. Bess, Tess....

J: Why they....?

M: Bess, Tess and Cress and....

J: Why did they change into mice?

M: Yes, they changed. All those witches changed into mice and Mog chased them.

The mother attempts to read the text but the child already knows what is happening and his "Why" question is inserted before the mother has a chance to read very far. The question is fairly difficult and an explanation could become quite complicated. Thus her answer may reflect the fact that she has misunderstood and is answering what she thinks she has heard or that it is the

end of a reading session, she really has understood and prefers to sidestep the issue. In either case she realizes that he knows the page and without bothering to go back to her reading paraphrases his question and closes the page.

That the mother enjoyed the contributions of the child as much for the fact that they were interesting as that they indicated a need for information or were amusing was often apparent. The following is a good example of the positive way in which she received his hypotheses and encouraged them:

M&M 2

J: Where's the bird now?

M: The bird's not there now.

J: Why?

M: <u>Each of them</u> ....

J: Why's the bird ....

M: The bird went to Florida.

J: No!

M: (laughs)

J: Well where is he?

M: I don't know. That's a good question. I don't know.

J: Somewhere in the trees.

M: In the tree, yes.

J: He went down, down the hill.

M: That's probably right. Sure, that's where the birds go.

J: Mm-hm.

In both of the M&M readings the question of the bird's whereabouts is very much on the child's mind. Notice how the mother goes along with his train of thought even though she is ready to read a new page (underlined). The child's comments, "Mm-hm" or "oh", occur at the end of most of the units in this last reading and appear to be an indication to the mother that she can continue.

INTERACTION

The role of the book in shaping the experience is an important one since it seems to have a significant effect on the type of mother-child responses. As mentioned earlier, the book is really an agenda for the mother and child. As each page appears it is a stimulus provoking some sort of reaction from the other participants. Who chooses to comment first and how is thus important. The entire data collected contained many examples of books other than storybooks. It was noted that poetry reading elicited a sort of Read-Complete-Evaluate exchange. Picture vocabulary books were treated as labelling sessions in which the talk was extended to actions and characters. Picture story books were difficult to give an immediate characterization.

The three books read in the tapings under consideration here are all very simple stories. The Meg and Mog books are treated in a similar way and they differ in many respects to Fred and Ted. Fred and Ted is a less fully developed story. Ten pages are devoted to illustrations of the 'oppositeness' of the two

characters while the rest of the book provides an example of what sort of mix-up this 'oppositeness' can lead to. The text becomes considerably more complicated at the end of the book where each page can contain as much as three or four complete sentences in succession. Dialogue is also contained in the text. Illustrations are simple, realistically coloured cartoon drawings. The Meg and Mog books on the other hand are illustrated in bold colours with more abstract drawings. There are captions on each page which represent what is said by the characters or the sound something makes. The story line starts on the first page with less time being given to character description. Each page contains only one or part of a simple sentence, a fact which caused difficulty in numbering pages for analysis. We decided that pages which contained only one sentence between them would be treated as one.

The mother chose not to read pages in only the Fred and Ted book and one can hypothesize possible explanations for this. Each page of both Meg and Mog books is necessary for an understanding of the story. Each page is also very colorful, interesting and has very simple text. The first page left out of Fred and Ted, on the other hand, (and it occurs in both tapings of the story) is one which is not necessary for an understanding of the story. It is merely another illustration of the differences between the two characters and contains a concept that may be difficult for the child (Fred was always broke). Thus, the mother may not have felt it worth while to explain it.

As well, it suffers in terms of interest in comparison with the page next to it which is more colorful and represents action which is probably more interesting for the child. The pages left out near the end of both Fred and Ted tapings are quite complicated in text content. Two or more simple sentences occur together and the character speech is in quotation marks which may be quite difficult to explain to a young child. Thus near the end of the Fred and Ted books the mother chooses only the highlights of the action and omits certain pages altogether.

As can be seen in Table 1, the mother tends to initiate most of the units. Child initiations, which occurred mainly in the four earlier tapings, were all comments about some aspect of the picture. Responses to these by the mother were either repetitions or evaluations after which she quickly reinitiated and led by questioning or comment back to the text. Thus the child initiations are only slight variations of the more usual mother initiations.

By the last tapings, initiating by reading occurred most frequently, increasing from 32 per cent in F&T1 to 87 per cent in M&M 2. During the last two sessions the mother also tended to group pages together more often for reading. To start off M&M 2, for example, she read the first five pages without a break or further comment. It was apparent from listening to the tapes that even though the child tried to interrupt her, the tone and flow of her voice indicated that his turn would come when she was finished. This tendancy was noticed as early as F&T 2 from which

the following is taken: (text is underlined)

M: Now they're going for a walk. They go uphill; they go downhill and they made tall talk and they made small talk.

J: Mom..

M: Did you get any sleep last night Ted? No, not a wink, Fred.

J: Mom...

M: My bed is too little. My bed is too big. What were you going to say, J?

J: Nothing.....They're sitting down.

Presumably the ability to know when to take one's turn is an important part in learning how to act in a story-reading situation. The example above and the figures in Table 1 indicate that early on the child is being taught to distinguish that print is different from speech, that the mother reads it and that print is presented in units which should not be interrupted.

Responses by the child to initiations by the mother undergo a similar change. It is these responses of the child that will give the mother clues about his understanding of the text and what she has said. Thus, if he simply repeats what she has said she will know that he has at least heard. If he gives some sort of appropriate response to the initiation such as an answer to a question, a comment indicating he agrees with what has been said or a question based directly on the initiation both in form and content (i.e., he refers to the initiation rather than to the picture) he is indicating that he has heard, that he has understood and that he wants more information. If he chooses to initiate a new topic himself he has either not heard what was read, has not understood or has done both, is comfortable with

the text and is secure enough to risk obtaining new information.

In F&T 1 eight out of sixteen (50 per cent) of the child's responses were appropriate answers to the mother's questions. If we count in the variations which occurred when the child initiated as described above we have thirteen out of twenty-one (62 per cent of total child responses) being appropriate answers to questions. The other 38 per cent were either introduction of a new topic after mother initiation by reading or no response*.

On the other hand, most of the initiations in M&M 2 were by the mother reading. Thus, only 9 per cent of the child's responses were appropriate answers to initiation by questioning whereas 83 per cent were new topic responses to initiation by reading. This is illustrated in diagram 5 and a full breakdown of Initiations and Responses from F&T 1, M&M 1 and M&M 2 is given in Table 3.

* No response may be somewhat ambiguous since it usually refers to pages read in a block by the mother to which only the last was responded.

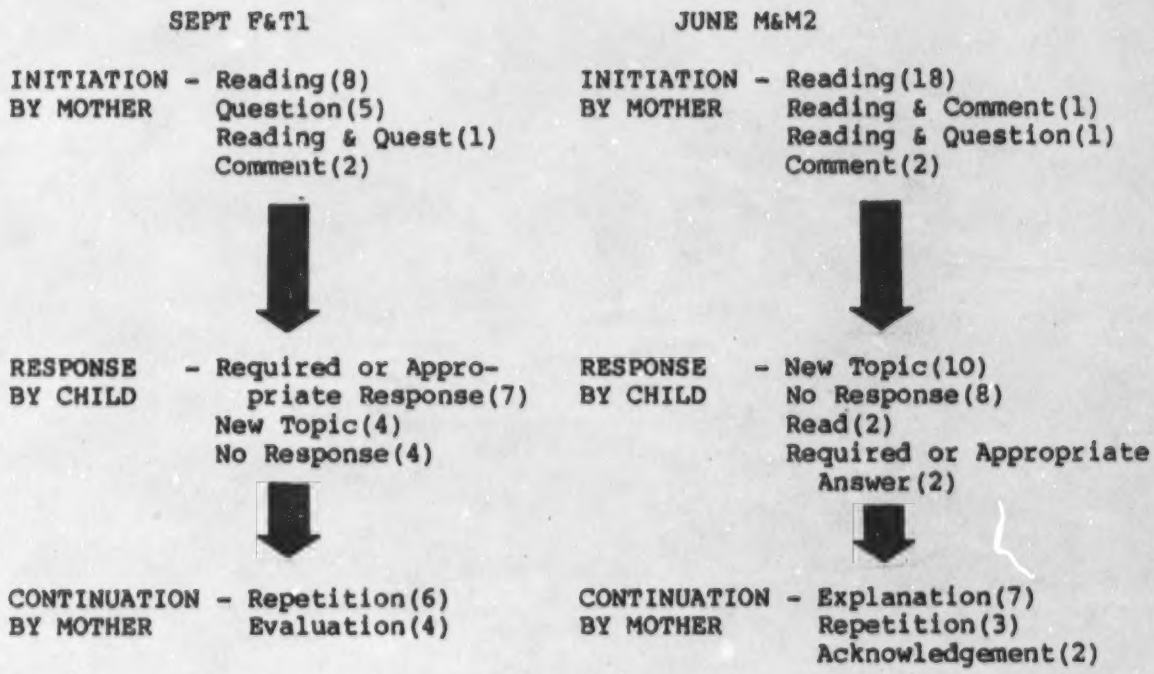

Diagram 5

One can see that certain types of initiations evoke certain types of responses. Questioning invariably brings an appropriate answer response from the child which is then evaluated by mother. Reading, on the other hand, can evoke the following responses: reading completion, repetition, no response or a new topic. By the last taped session the interaction had become quite predictable changing from:

Initiation by Questioning - Response by Answer - Continuation by Evaluation to:

Initiation by Reading - Response by New Topic - Continuation by Explanation.

A breakdown of M&M 2 is given in Table 4. It seems fairly clear that at this point the mother's role has become that of presenter

of text and source of information rather than that of interpreter. The child has now assumed control of what information he wants to receive and this may or may not be related to the text.

PAGE(s) READ By Mother	RESPONSE By Child	CONTINUATION By Mother	END By Child
1,2,3,4,5	Question - New topic	Explanation	"Right"
6,7	" " "	"	"Oh."
8	" " "	"	
9	Child completes by Reading	Repitition	
10	Question - New topic	Explanation	
11,12	" " "	"	"Mm"
13	No response		
14	Question - New topic	"	"Mm"
15	Question	Explanation	
(16 Child initiates	with Question)	"	"Mm"
17	Completion by Reading	Evaluation	
18,19	Question - New Topic	Yes response to Question	"Oh"
(20 Child reads)		Evaluation	
21	New Topic	Yes response to Comment	
22	Question	Explanation	
23	Question - New Topic	"	
24 (Question)	Response	Evaluation	

Table 4

The fact that the child in his response turns comes to initiate new topics and that the mother responds to these rather than pursues her own topics is interesting in the light of research done by Levinson (1980) who reports similar findings in her investigation of mother-child dialogue. Thus in the reading situation, as the child becomes more competent linguistically and in understanding the story, the mother is gradually allowing the child to assume control over his own learning. He is able to choose by questioning what interests him in the text or picture for consideration and comment. Certainly in M&M 2 she has relinquished much of the control of information.

Even when, as in the following example from M&M2 she has an agenda, she postpones it in favour of his questions and returns to it only when his signal is given. Interestingly enough she is presenting a new kind of information in this sequence that may account for the return to questioning that was more characteristic of the three early tapings.

M: Up in the sky she met her friends going to the party, Jess, Bess, Tess and Cress. Is there a J for J____?

J: Mum, why...

M: Because that's how the cat rides, piggyback on the broom.

J: Because he can't fly.

M: That's right, so he needs the broom to help him.

J: Mm.

M: Where's the J for J____? Is there a J for J____? On this page somehwere?

The mother is able to build knowledge when the opportunity arises by tuning in to the child's interests. Often there are what may be considered teaching sequences in which she expands on his knowledge by explaining or referring to a real world event familiar to a child. Consider the following example.

MS 1

J: Mog and Owl went fishing and caught a fish. It's a whopper.

J: Why's it a big fish?

M: Because they're going to eat that fish. They're going to cook it and eat it. Remember when we went to John and Adie's house?

J: Yes.

M: And did you see John cooking a big fish?

J: Big fish like this?

M: Maybe not quite so big.

J: Like a small.

M: Yes, smaller than that. But not yellow, brown fish. More this colour.

J: Not like that. Why's it not like that colour?

M: Not. (Interrupted)

J: (Garbled)

M: Because it's a different kind of fish, you see.

J: Why's that?

M: That is a fat fish, and John did a thin fish.

J: Why's this fish not that colour?

M: I don't know. You should ask John why.

Here the mother lets the child guide the conversation by referring back to the familiar event as a touchstone.

This type of interaction is in direct contrast to the teaching situation described by Mehan (1979) in which the teacher initiates a topic, the student is expected to give an appropriate response on this topic and the teacher evaluates. In the mother-child dialogues in the last two tapings it is most often the child who initiates a topic and then evaluates the mother's response.

PRESENTATION OF TEXT

An examination of how the mother was presenting text to the child reveals differences between the first and last readings

that are quite noticeable. Text was most often used to initiate a unit in M&M 2 and eighteen of the twenty-four pages were simply read by the mother without attempt at leading the conversation further. In F&T 1 on the other hand only eight of twenty-one pages were read by the mother to initiate a unit and of these only 4 were merely read without comment or question. In other cases, text was embedded in the conversation and was read after some discussion or comment about the picture. The following is an example of this type of discussion contained in a unit:

F&T 1

J: Fred and Ted

M: Yes. Which one's getting wet, J?

J: This one.

M: Why?

J: This one has an umbrella.

M: Yes.

J: This one has no umbrella. This one has no umbrella. This one has (unintelligible) umbrella.

M: Yes. So when they walked in the rain, Fred got wet, but Ted stayed dry.

In this case the child initiated a page, but the mother then assumed control of the conversation by questioning him about the picture. This is similar in form to the following example in which the mother initiates and leads the child to the text:

F&T 1

M: What are they doing over here?

J: Having supper.

M: Yes. Fred ate spinach and Ted ate beets. What's this in here?

J: Wine

A variation of this occurs when the mother carries the whole conversation about a page by herself as she initiates and responds and reads:

F&T 1

M: Oh. Now they're playing some music, right? They both liked music. Fred played the flute and Ted played the tuba. Look at that big tuba.

The mother in all of these examples taken from the first tapings appears to be providing a framework for the text in which she tries to ensure that the child knows what is happening in the story. It is quite different from the pattern described above for M&M 2 in which text stands on its own.

Another indication of the child's increasing ability to understand a story is the amount of text read in two versions of the same story occurring two months apart.

F&T 1

J: They're sitting down. They're no rolling.

M: No rolling, eh?

J: No, they're sitting down.

M: Are they sitting down?

J: Yes.

M: Yes.

J: They're having a rest.

M: Are they having a rest?

J: They're having a rest.

F&T 2

M: I know what to do, said the bird.

J: Their eyes are open.

M: Yes, what are they looking at?

J: The bird.

M: Yes, and the bird says, "Switch rooms.

M: Yes, yes. And the bird says that Ted should sleep upstairs and Fred should sleep downstairs.

J: Oh. And no more get mad.

M: No get mad now, no. So where are they going?

J: Go home.

M: Yes. Try the beds out, right? Yes? There they go. Ted jumped into the little bed upstairs and Fred jumped into the big bed downstairs.

Ted should sleep upstairs and Fred should sleep downstairs. And Fred said, Of course and Ted said, The bird's got the word. Back to bed, yelled Ted. Back to bed yelled Fred. It's downstairs for me, yelled Fred. It's upstairs for me.

J: He's going, he's going to big bed.

M: That's right and the little one's going in the

J: Little bed.

One can see that in the second version there is considerably less talk about what is happening in the picture and more text read without comment. In the second version as well, the child is able to provide detail about what the text would say without prompting (He's going to big bed.)

This example is interesting in other ways. Note how skilled the mother is at supporting the child's speech and leading him into the story. She manages to direct every comment made by the child toward what is happening. The first version in particular takes the form of a conversation in which reading the text is a part of the dialogue that does not intrude on the conversational tone. Note the changes in text the mother makes: past becomes present and dialogue become embedded. Text in version two, on the other hand, is starting to become separate from conversation, an entity which stands by itself.

Each comment that the child makes is supported by the mother usually by repetition and often by a "Yes" evaluation. In fact the only times she contradicted the child during the tapings or gave a negative evaluation were when he "read" the text incorrectly or interpreted a picture incorrectly (e.g., snow not paint). Any hypothesis he made about the characters or events was accepted and encouraged.

Another illustration of this is an example taken from two versions of Meg and Mog which occur eight months apart.

M&M 1		M&M 2	
M:	She's making breakfast.	M:	She took out of her cupboard 3 eggs, bread, cocoa, milk, a kipper and jam.
J:	Bread.	J:	And a fish.
M:	Where's the bread? What are these?	M:	Yes, a fish.
J:	Eggs.		
M:	And what's this?		
J:	Milk.		
M:	Right. Is this cocoa?		
J:	Mm-hm.		
M:	A kipper and jam. She puts them all in a cauldron and stirs it up. Bubble, bubble. And the owl goes Mmmmm and Meg goes Yum, Yum and Mog goes Purr. They're all eating their breakfast.		She put it all in her cauldron and stirred it up.
		J:	Why, why, why a fire?
		M:	I don't know. That's how she cooks, in a big pot over a fire. Mmm, yum yum. Oh, the cat's feeling better. The cat says Purr. There was plenty of breakfast for everyone.

Here we see that the author assumes that the reader knows breakfast is being made. He therefore does not mention this

detail and talks instead about what is going into the pot. He assumes as well that it is not necessary to mention that everyone was eating if he says simply "There was plenty of breakfast for everyone." The mother does not take this knowledge for granted, however, and, in the first version, explains exactly what the pictures represent, i.e., making breakfast and eating it. In the version that occurs seven months later she appears to assume that child now has this basic information and by hearing only the text will be able to infer the rest. By the last version of M&M 2 there is a tendancy for the text to become separate from conversation and stand by itself, usually as the initiation of a unit. It requires little supporting description from the mother or direct response from the child.

THE CHILD'S INFORMATION

By the time of the first taping of Fred and Ted the child was competent at labelling, being able to supply not only names for objects but also information about size, colour, number and descriptors such as wet, dry, tired. He was also able to name actions described by the pictures (driving, sleeping, painting) and how these were performed (far, fast, well). Thus he had passed the stage described by Ninio and Bruner (1978) at which he realized that pictures are "two dimensional representations of three dimensional objects."

It is interesting to note that he was still not very skillfull at interpreting artistic conventions. He mistook paint

for snow and the moon for the sun in F&T 2. In both of these cases he was unable to deduce the correct information from that given in the rest of the picture. His guess "moon" resulted from looking at a picture where the two main characters were sleeping. The sky outside the room was blue, however, and he missed an important aspect of the story because of this incorret deduction, i.e., that the characters were so tired from the poor sleep the night before they needed to sleep in the daytime. The mother corrected him and supplied the missing information:

> M: Yes, it's not even dark out and they're sleeping when it's not night time.

One can note the frequency of Why questions in M&M 2 in the interaction and the shift of control from mother to child. This is important in terms of the information the child is seeking. In Fred and Ted 1 & 2 information supplied by the child consisted mostly of "What's this" or "What's happening here" types of comments. As his repertoire of questions grew, however, he required more information and this of a more complex nature. Thus he no longer commented on what the picture was but tended to ask why it was. He was able to interpret a picture and ask the reasons for the state or action represented.

Although the child recognized a picture and could name the objects and actions in it he was unable at times to understand why the representation left out details. An example of this occurred in MS 1 where the owl, usually shown in flight, was

pictured sitting on a tree:

J: Hey hey! Where's the bird's wings?

M: Right there. See, when a bird flies, the wings go out like your arms go out, but when the bird doesn't fly they get tucked in.

Similarly he doesn't understand why only a little bit of the cat is shown in MS 1.

J: Where's the cat?

M: You look for him on this page and see if you can see a little bit of the cat.

J: Why a little bit of the cat?

M: Because the cat is getting into the helicopter. We don't see it on the page but we know that's it going into the helicopter.

J: Yeah.

M: Because we know where the ladder is.

On many occasions he noted the absence from the picture of something he considered important. Apparently he was unable to identify what information was necessary for an understanding of the text. In the following example he knows that cars are part of the story but doesn't realize that they are not important at this particular point. The mother accepts his questions, though irrelevant to the text, with interest and expands on them.

F&T 1

J: There's no cars.

M: No cars? Where are the cars?

J: In the garage.

M: In the garage, eh? Maybe they'd get paint on their cars - They had to put the cars away, right? Yes.

J: They're forgot.

M: They forgot. OK.

This type of interaction occurs frequently throughout the tapings.

He is also unable to infer from information on two successive pages the action that occurs between them but is not represented in pictures or text. Consider the following example in which the first picture shows the witch walking downstairs where the cat is sleeping and the second shows a picture of the cat in great pain. The text reads, "She trod on Mog's tail."

M&M 1

M: She stepped on Mog's tail.

J: Why?

M: Why? She didn't see it. See, she's walking down the stairs and there's the tail on the floor.

J: There's the tail. She didn't step on it.

M: Yes, not there, but here she steps on it. And the cat is...

J: She's going to step on it.

M: Yes, she is, she's not looking where she's going, is she?

Thus the mother helps the child supply missing information necessary for a complete understanding of the text. Because she has done this, however, is no guarantee that the child will remember or pass it by without question. Note the same page read six months later:

M: She trod on Mog's tail.

J: Is someone step on his tail?

Whether it is because she has used the word 'trod' which may be

unfamiliar to him or because he still doesn't understand completely or because he is reassuring himself that he really does know what is happening he feels it necessary to question the text again.

The mother not only supplies information such as this about the text but also indicates how one should feel about the story and how the characters themselves are feeling. This is done quite incidentally and occurs as she describes her reactions. Fred and Ted 1 & 2 are interspersed with comments such as "Oh dear," "What's happening", or "Poor old Fred." Although there is no attempt on her part to draw the child's attention to it he nevertheless learns from what she says. In his version of F&T 2 quoted earlier in the paper he reproduces these comments as part of it. In a similar way she teaches him how the characters in the story are feeling with questions such as "Does she look happy or sad?" or "She's a little bit worried." It was quite clear as well that the mother used the text to "teach" a world view to the child. She was very conscious of the characters' treatment of each other and what their reactions might be. She was also very careful to indicate that "she" was driving the helicopter in MS 1 & 2 or, in the case of some of the other tapes that women are quite able to drive tractors, build houses, etc. The book is used as a springboard to discuss numerous topics generalisable to the child's experience. Again there is an interactional effect in which the child's experience serves to clarify the book and the book clarifies the child's experience.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The analysis of the data raised a number of interesting questions. In the first place, the interactional pattern which appeared to be developing was quite different from that described by Ninio and Bruner in their study of a younger child and Heath (in press) in her studies of older children. Although the ultimate control of the situation rested with the mother (she was able to read the text) she was very sensitive to the child's needs for information. She was willing to negotiate the choice of book or abandon her agenda in favour of the child's.

In the first of the taped sessions she noted the information she felt to be important by commenting on it or asking questions, but she gradually relinquished her role as 'teacher' as time progressed allowing the child to select what he wanted to know and responding to it. Whether this occurred because she tired of reading the same stories over and over or because she realized that the child was becoming more competent or because they were developing a style of interaction that best suited them cannot be said with certainty. It is also not known if this kind of interaction at this particular age is typical although work done by Wells (1980) would tend to suggest that at least among certain groups of people it is. Certainly the child is providing a great deal of input to the conversation and this input is highly valued by the mother. It would be interesting to study a nursery school group story-reading time in order to compare quantity and type of children's input and type of interaction with the teacher. It

must be noted in this situation that the child as well as being able to control much of his own learning was able to touch the book, and point to exactly what he wanted and turn the pages himself.

The changing role of parent and child was paralleled by a change in the role of the text in the interaction. In the first readings it appeared to be used as the last means of describing events on a page and was often embedded in the conversation of the mother as she led the child gradually towards it. Thus it was supported by the mother and did not stand by itself. More text came to be read in chunks, and used as the initiation of a unit, it was accompanied by little, if any comment. As such it developed an identity as text which was quite different from speech and which prompted no direct response from the child. It may be through the gradual withdrawal of the mother's accompanying comment that the child began to recognize written speech and started to hear it as something meaningful on its own. This appears to be the same kind of scaffolding of information dealt with in regard to labelling by Ninio and Bruner (1979).

The growing competence of the child in regard to text as seen in the type of interaction was also parallelled in the types of information he was acquiring. He progressed from labelling of characters and events in the first stories to being able to speculate on the causes for these actions and the effects they were having on the characters. The information required or given

by the mother in the first stories was requested by the child in the last ones as he added to his depth of understanding. One can hypothesize that through many readings of a story the colouring in of an outline sketch is accomplished. Each reading provides more detail until a reasonably complete and well drawn picture is formed.

Development of the child's ability to seek out and understand more complex information is undoubtedly the result in part of the child's increased linguistic competence and his gradual maturing. As questions become more a part of his speech he is able to assert himself, more particularly when he is able to use Why questions to their fullest effect. One can speculate on an interactional process here between acquisition of literacy and linguistic competence - familiarity with the books allows the child to build on his existing knowledge encouraging him to take risks in asking questions. His increasing linguistic competence facilitates the question asking so that he can build his knowledge. This kind of interactional effect is also suggested by Snow (1981).

One can hypothesize on the basis of the observations in this study about the types of pre-print knowledge a child acquires about a picture story as he learns to understand it. He becomes able to label the objects and events in a picture and to recognize that they are symbols of reality. He becomes familiar with the conventions used by the artist and the author in order to make the proper interpretations. He becomes able to make a

large number of inferences about what may be happening between one page and the next and he starts to realize that the characters have personalities and become involved in fictional events. From this speculation arise questions such as: do all children whether they have been read to or not possess these skills and this knowledge? can complete understanding of a story occur if one is deficient in these areas? are these things learned only by being read to? do they occur in some sequential order? are these stages in the child's understanding of stories through which he must pass on the way to becoming literate? These questions certainly provide fertile ground for further study.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bruce, Bertram. A social interaction model of reading (Tech. Rep. 218). Urbana: University of Illinois, Center for the Study of Reading, September 1981.

Burton, D. The sociolinguistic analysis of spoken discourse. In P. French & M. Maclure (Eds.), Adult-child Conversation. New York: St. Martins, 1981.

Clark, M. Young fluent readers. London: Heinemann, 1976.

Cross, T. G. Mother's speech and its association with rate of syntactic acquisition in young children. In N. Waterson and C. Snow, eds., The Development of Communication: Social and Pragmatic Factors in Language Acquisition. New York: J. Wiley & Sons, 1978.

Donaldson, M. Children's minds. Glasgow: Fontana, 1978.

Dore, J. "Oh them sheriff": A Pragmatic analysis of child's responses to questions. In S. Ervin-Tripp (Ed.), Language, thought and culture: Advances in the study of cognition. New York: Academic Press, 1977.

Downing, J. Reading and reasoning. New York: Springer-Verlag, 1979.

Downing, J. Cognitive clarity and linguistic awareness. Paper presented at the International Seminar on Linguistic Awareness and Learning to Read, University of Victoria, 1979.

Durkin, D. Children who read early. New York: Teachers College Press, 1966.

Eastman, P.D. Big Dog...Little Dog: A bedtime story. New York: Random House, 1973.

Flood, J. Parental styles in reading episodes with young children. The Reading Teacher, 1977, 30, 864-867.

Goodman, K. S. Reading: a psycholinguistic guessing game. In H. Singer and R. Ruddell (Eds.), Theoretical models and processes of reading (2nd ed.). Newark, Del.: International Reading Association, 1976.

Harkness, F. Reading to children as a reading readiness activity. Viewpoints in Teaching and Learning. 1981, 57(3), 39-48.

Heath, S. B. (in press). What no bedtime story means: Narrative skills at home and school. Language and Society.

Heath, S. B. (in press). Ways with words: Ethnography of communication, communities, and classrooms.

Levinson, Judith B. The Relationship between child utterances and parent responses. Papers and Reports and Child Language Development, No. 19. Calif.: Stanford University, 1980.

Mason, J. Prereading: a developmental perspective (Tech. Rep. 198). Urbana: University of Illinois, Center for the Study of Reading, February, 1981.

McTear, M. F. Towards a model for analysing conversations involving children. In P. French & M. Maclure (Eds.), Adult-child conversation. New York: St. Martins, 1981.

Mehan, H. Learning lessons: Social organization in the classroom. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979.

Nicoll, Helen & Pienkowski, J. Meg and Mog. England: Puffin Books, 1972.

Nicoll, Helen & Pienkowski, J. Meg at Sea. England: Puffin Books, 1973.

Ninio, A., & Bruner, J. The achievement and antecedents of labelling. Journal of Child Language, 1978, 5, 1-15.

Rommetveit, Ragnar. On Piagetian Cognitive Operations, Semantic competence and message structure in Adult-Child Communication. In Makarova, I. (ed.). The Social Context of Language. Great Britain: John Wiley & Sons, 1978.

Sachs, J. Topic selection in parent-child discourse. Discourse Processes, 1979, 1, 145-153.

Schickedanz, J. A. "Please read that story again!" Exploring relationships between story reading and learning to read, Young Children, 1978, 33, 48-55.

Scollon, R., & Scollon, S. B. K. The literate two-year old: the fictionalization of self. In Narrative, literacy, and face in interethnic communication. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1981.

Sinclair, J. M., & Coulthard, R. M. Towards an analysis of discourse. New York, Oxford University Press, 1975.

Smith, F. Understanding reading (2nd ed.). Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978.

Snow, C. E. & Ferguson, Charles A. ed. Talking to children: Language input and acquisition. Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Snow, C. E. & Goldfield, B.A. (in press). Turn the page, please: situation-specific language acquisition. Journal of Child Language.

Snow, C. E. Literacy and Language: relationships during the preschool years. Paper presented at AERA, New York, March 1982.

Soderbergh, R. Reading in early childhood: A linguistic study of a preschool child's gradual acquisition of reading ability. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1977.

Teale, W. H. Parents reading to their children: What we know and need to know. Language Arts, 1981, 58, 902-912.

Teale, W. H. Learning about learning to read by observing parents reading to their children. Paper presented at the annual meeting of IRA, New Orleans, 1981.

Teale, W. H. (To appear). Toward a theory of how children learn to read and write naturally. Language Arts.

Walker, G. H., & Kuerbitz, I. E. Reading to preschoolers as an aid to successful beginning reading. Reading Improvement, 1979, 16, 149-154.

Wells, G. Language and Learning: Talk between adults and children at home and at school. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Congress of Psychology (22nd, Leipzig, German Democratic Republic), July 1980.

Wells, G., & Montgomery, M. Adult-child interaction at home and at school. In P. French & M. Maclure (Eds.), Adult-child conversation. New York: St. Martin's, 1981.